

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 EB-07 TRSE-00
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PLOS, CU
SUBJECT: REPORT OF US VESSEL DETAINED BY CUBA

SUMMARY: MASTER OF US-FLAG SAILING VESSEL "THE WIZARD OF BRISTOL" REPORTED TO EMBASSY TODAY THAT HIS VESSEL WAS SEIZED BY CUBAN GUNBOATS ON MAY 18 IN OLD BAHAMA CHANNEL, DETAINED INCOMMUNICADO FOR 36 HOURS IN PORT OF NUEVITAS, AND THEN RELEASED. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JUNE 2, EMBOFFS MET WITH JOHN DINNENY, MASTER OF 67-FOOT US-FLAG SAILING VESSEL "THE WIZARD OF BRISTOL" (WOB). HE REPORTED THE FOLLOWING INCIDENT AND REQUESTED GUIDANCE ON HOW NEXT TO PROCEED.

2. WOB IS CLASSED AS A HISTORIC US VESSEL, BUILT IN 1916. SHE HAS A 50 HP AUXILIARY DIESEL ENGINE. DINNENY WAS ENGAGED BY WOB OWNER (EDWARD TAYLOR, 2811 CARLETON ST., SAN DIEGO CALIFORNIA) TO SAIL HER FROM KEY WEST TO SAN DIEGO VIA PANAMA CANAL. CREW OF NINE INCLUDED DINNENY AND WIFE, OWNER'S 16-YEAR OLD SON, AND SIX NON-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROFESSIONALS WHO SIGNED ON FOR TRIP ON A "SHARE EXPENSES" BASIS.

3. WOB DEPARTED KEY WEST MAY 13, AND WAS EN ROUTE TO WINDWARD PASSAGE VIA OLD BAHAMA CHANNEL. ON MAY 18, AT APPROXIMATELY 1330, AT APPROXIMATE POSITION 22-34 N, 78-05 W, OFF NORTH COAST OF CUBA, SHE WAS

STOPPED, RAMMED (ONE PLANK STOVE IN AT STERN) AND BOARDED BY CUBAN GUNBOAT. VESSEL HAD BEEN TACKING DOWN THE 11-MILE CHANNEL. DINNENY WAS BELOW ASLEEP FOR 2-3 HOURS PRIOR TO BOARDING, AND COULD NOT SAY WHETHER SHE MIGHT HAVE INADVERTENTLY VIOLATED CUBAN 3-MILE TERRITORIAL WATERS--COAST IS LOW-LYING, AND INEXPERIENCED CREW MEMBERS ON DECK WERE NOT ABLE TO ESTIMATE PRECISE DISTANCE FROM SHORE.

4. WHEN BOARDED, DINNENY STATES HE ACTIVATED TWO STANDARD DISTRESS RADIO TRANSMITTERS, BOTH OF WHICH OPERATED CONTINUOUSLY UNTIL WOB ENTERED CUBAN PORT.

5. WOB WAS ORDERED PROCEED UNDER ESCORT, WITH ARMED CUBAN GUARDS ON BOARD, TO PORT OF NUEVITAS. NIGHTS OF MAY 18 AND 19 SHE WAS ANCHORED OFF CUBAN COAST. DINNENY SAID CUBAN PERSONNEL'S SHIP-HANDLING WAS EXTREMELY INEPT, THAT VESSEL WAS IN DANGER OF RUNNING AGROUND SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE TRIP, AND THAT SHE WAS RUN AGROUND THREE TIMES WHILE ENTERING NUEVITAS LATE AFTERNOON MAY 20. AS A RESULT, BOTTOM PLANKS WERE SPRUNG AND VESSEL HAS BEEN TAKING WATER SINCE.

6. UPON ARRIVAL IN NUEVITAS (WHERE DINNENY SAID HE SAW NUMEROUS SOVIET FREIGHTERS), ENTIRE CREW WAS REMOVED FROM WOB, HOUSED FOR EVENING IN UNSANITARY AND MOSQUITO-INFESTED QUARTERS, AND UNDERWENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INTERROGATION. AT THAT TIME, CUBANS STATED THAT WOB HAD BEEN UNDER SURVEILLANCE AND VIOLATED CUBAN TERRITORIAL WATERS. DINNENY SAID HE WAS ADVISED OF NO FORMAL CHARGES OR OTHER REASON FOR WOB SEIZURE. HE SAID CUBAN GUARDS ON WOB REMARKED THAT OTHER VESSELS (NFI) HAD ALSO BEEN TAKEN IN SAME AREA.

7. WOB WAS HELD IN NUEVITAS FOR SOME 36 HOURS, DINNENY SAID, CREW WAS INCOMMUNICADO; NEITHER 8 US CITIZENS NOR 1 BRITISH SUBJECT WERE PERMITTED TO CONTACT ANY EMBASSY. AT APPROXIMATELY 0830 MAY 22, WOB WAS ALLOWED TO DEPART. ALL BUT A FEW ITEMS OF PERSONAL PROPERTY WERE RETURNED, INCLUDING ONE .32 CALIBER PISTOL BELONGING TO DINNENY. HE SAID THERE WERE ABSOLUTELY NO DRUGS OR OTHER COUNTRABAND ON BOARD, NO WEAPONS EXCEPT HIS PERSONAL PISTOL, AND NO PHOTOGRAPHIC OR OPTICAL EQUIPMENT BEYOND PERSONAL POSSESSIONS. AM RADIO ANTENNA WAS INOPERATIVE AND HAD RANGE OF ABOUT TWO MILES.

UHF RADIO, DINNEY SAID, WAS ANTIQUATED AND APPARENTLY INOPERABLE. NO OTHER RADIO OR ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT ABOARD.

8. AT APPROXIMATELY 1330 MAY 22, WOB PASSED WITHIN 2-3 MILES OF US NAVAL VESSEL HEARING NUMBER 866.

(APPROXIMATE POSTION 21-50 N, 77-0 W) AND ADVISED HER BY RADIO OF WOB DENTENTION AND RELEASE. DINNENY INFORMED NAVY SHIP THAT HE CONSIDERED WOB STILL IN PERIL FROM CUBANS.

9. DURING NIGHT OF MMAY 22, DINNENY SAID AT LEAST FOUR CUBAN VESSELS SOUGHT TO INTERCEPT WOB. HE EXTINGUISHED RUNNING LIGHTS, TOOK EVASIVE ACTION AND FINALLY LOST THEM IN A STORM.

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10. WOB PROCEEDED TO GRAND INAGUA IN BAHAMAS, WHERE SHE REMAINED OVERNIGHT MAY 23. DURING NIGHT OF MAY 24, WOB TRANSITED WINDWARD PASSAGE, RUNNING WITHOUT LIGHTS AND CLOSE TO HAITIAN SHORE. DINNENY SAID HE SAW LIGHTS OF WHAT APPEARED TO BE TWO CUBAN PATROL VESSELS IN PASSAGE, BUT HAD NO INDICATION THEY SAW HIM. HE SAW NO OTHER SIGN OF SURVEILLANCE AFTER HIS DETENTION AND RELEASE.

11. AFTER CLEARING PASSAGE, WOB PROCEEDED AGAINST HEADWINDS AND CALMS TO CRISTOBAL, CANAL ZONE, ARRIVING EARLY MORNING OF JUNE 1.

12. DINNENY STATES THAT DUE TO HISTORIC NATURE OF WOB, AND ITS UNUSUAL TRIP FROM KEY WEST TO CALIFORNIA VIA CANAL, TRIP ATTRACTED SOME MEDIA NOTICE INCLUDING A FULL PAGE SPREAD IN A KEY WEST PAPER. A REPORTER FROM THAT PAPER HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO FOLLOW AND COVER TRIP. ONE OF THE NON-PROFESSIONAL CREW WAS CHARACTERIZED BY DINNENY AS "ONE OF NADER'S RAIDERS". ANOTHER SOLD PUBLICATION RIGHTS FOR A STORY OR BOOK ABOUT THE TRIP TO A US PUBLISHER BEFORE DEPARTURE.

13. DINNENY SAID HE AND CREW INTENDED TO MAKE A STORY AVAILABLE TO US MEDIA UNLESS USG SAW A COMPELLING FOREIGN POLICY INTEREST IN NOT DOING SO. IF LATTER WERE THE CASE, DINNENY SAID HE FELT SURE OWNER AND OTHER CREW MEMBERS WOULD COOPERATE IN NOT RAISING A PUBLIC STINK. HOWEVER, HE WISHED HIS PROTEST OVER THIS HANDLING OF A US-FLAG VESSEL TO BE A MATTER OF RECORD WITH USG, AND ASKED FOR GUIDANCE AS TO WHAT

USG FELT HE COULD AND/OR SHOULD DO NEXT.
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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Subject: REPORT OF US VESSEL DETAINED BY CUBA SUMMARY: MASTER OF US-FLAG SAILING VESSEL "THE WIZARD OF BRISTOL"
REPORTED TO EMBASSY TODAY THAT HIS VES
TAGS: PLOS, CU, US
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